

Social media etiquette

Post online images of clients without permission at your peril, warns Gemma Ward

A rather unexpected thing happened to me last month when I visited a local beauty salon. A 'before and after' snap of my face in all its poorly lit glory ended up on Twitter. And this was posted without my consent and to my absolute horror in full view of thousands of followers.

This may seem dramatic, but let me explain: I despise having my photograph taken at the best of times. So to suffer this intrusion in what *should* be one of the most private of private places (behind the closed door of the beauty room) was going beyond the pale.

The entire incident got me thinking about social media etiquette and how salon owners should be treating their clients online. I'm all for helping local businesses promote their treatments and even I've overcome my photo phobia in the past to pose for requests (albeit from the back to show off a new hairstyle or from the wrist down after a manicure). I think using *Facebook* and *Twitter* as a real-time salon portfolio is quite a shrewd marketing strategy – particularly for services that yield dramatic results. However, it's one thing for salon professionals to ask if they can take a client's photo for their records and quite another to then post that image online without asking permission.

The law about image copyright and

social media isn't as black and white as one might expect. As a photographer in a public space, you have complete rights to any image you take. However, in a private space, such as the salon where a client is paying for your service, the area of posting their image (basically with advertising

all clients to sign a medical consent form that informs them that images have to be taken for insurance purposes and may be used in marketing," says Karen Betts, MD for Nouveau Contour. "However, we also always double check with the client before posting any images onto something like

Twitter and we ask all clients to sign a personal release form."

It's also imperative that staff managing social media accounts are fully aware of the salon's online business policy. "We expect everyone who participates in online commentary to understand and follow some simple but essential guidelines," says Steve Rowbottom, director for North England salon group Westrow. "It's paramount to ask permission to publish or report on client conversations or images that are meant to be private. In any business, communication is a key aspect of its success, so simple steps such as these, which show that it has guidelines in place, ensures the confidence of your clients when using them in your promotions."

If you want my advice, avoid a similar scenario to the one aforementioned at all costs.

intentions) becomes very grey indeed.

So how do you ensure that your business doesn't get into hot water? The best advice is to be absolutely sure that you have any client's consent before you post *anything* about them online: "We ask

Even if posting images without a client's consent isn't illegal, it is almost certainly unethical. I for one will not be visiting the said local salon ever again. I'll also be hiding all the more whenever the camera comes out in future.

